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Seers and Jesters: Predicting the Future and Punning by Graph Analysis

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Chinese graphs are traditionally defined by their *xing* 形 (form), *yin* 音 (sound) and *yi* 義 (meaning). In addition to its importance as a mnemonic guide for the learner, the practice of 'dissecting graphs' (*chaizi* 拆 字), graph analysis or glyphomancy (when used in predictions) is an important element of the 'study of graphs' (*zixue* 字 學).[1] The analysis of graphs may serve as a paronomastic device or as a divinatory technique; it can be based on a graph's form or shape, its phonetic value, any of its semantic aspects, and combinations of these three aspects.

The first systematised attempt to analyse and to categorise graphs and their development was made by Xu Shen 許 慎 (c. 55 - c. 149). He laid the basis for the traditional understanding of the Chinese writing system in his postface (*xu* 序) to the *Shuowen jiezi* 說 文 解 字 (Explorations on Complex Graphs and Explanations of Simple Graphs).[2] Traditional as well as modern etymologists, graph analysts, and other *zixue* specialists tend to refer to his 'six categories of graphs' or 'six scripts' (*liu shu* 六 書).[3] Practitioners and treatises on "dissecting

[1] For the introduction of the term glyphomancy to Sinology see Needham (1956), p. 364.

[2] For Xu Shen's afterword see *Shuowen jiezi zhu*, pp. 761-795, for translations see Malmqvist (1974) and Winter (1998).

[3] For an apt and concise summary on Xu Shen's *liushu* see Boltz (1994), pp. 143-155.

characters" are part of the same tradition which produced, on the one hand, more 'scholarly' etymologies and analysis and, on the other hand, a more 'intuitional' approach towards the anatomy of graphs. Although it is almost impossible to draw a clear line between these two sub-traditions, it is important to point out that the context in which glyphomancers analyse graphs is, in most cases, much wider than just the graphs' specific form, sound, and meaning.[4] In their etymologies, Han and Song scholars showed great concern for cosmological and philosophical considerations; some of them are noted for their notoriously idiosyncratic and uncompromisingly intuitional readings.[5] Glyphomancers, like physiognomers, are concerned with forms and shapes but, unlike most etymologists of the Manchu period who show a tendency to isolate graphs and words from their context, they perceive a specific given form in a situational or cosmological framework.[6] The graph analyst has therefore considerable space in his analysis of graphic forms. So-called philological etymologies and analysis of graphs and their components which are largely based on Xu Shen's principles and the insights of later generations, pose no restriction for the more creative approach of glyphomancers and poets.

The practice of dissecting graphs can serve as either a literary device or a way to predict the future. As a literary device, this technique is mainly referred to as *xizi* 析字 (splitting graphs); outlines of its technical aspects are found in nearly all works on *xiucixue* 修辭學, the Chinese version of rhetoric.[7] As will be shown, paronomasia by dissecting characters and indicating covert meanings not only challenged the fantasy of a literary audience but also bibliographers. For most poets and writers concealing the meaning, dissecting graphs, and punning were merely part of the wider perception of literature as a game.[8] The *homo ludens* could play with script and language for fun, in other terms, without any immediate relevance or consequence in real life. The analysis of graphs for divinatory purposes was however closely associated with the 'mystical aura' of the

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[4] It is, however, noteworthy that a number of etymologists did also base their findings on a cosmological context; see e.g. Xu Shen's famous explanation of *wang* 王 (king) in *Shuowen jiezi zhu*, p. 9 [1A: 18a] where he explained this graph as a compound of *san* 三, i.e. *tian* 天 (heaven), *di* 地 (earth), *ren* 人 (man), and a vertical line which connects the *san cai* 三才 (three powers [of the universe]).

[5] For short references on Song scholars see Lo (1976), p. 24.

[6] The analyst's interpretation of a particular graph is subject to a number of determinants. Signs and omina, situational aspects and circumstances (surroundings, time, weather, sounds etc.) under which the inquiry is made, as well as the four seasons, analogies to animals or similar objects, calligraphic aspects, implications in relation to the Five Phases or Trigrams, Hexagrams and so forth may be taken into account.

[7] For a concise overview see Kao (1986).

[8] For some thought on literature as a game see Martin (1998), pp. 87-110.

script and its relationship to archaic religious practices, that is to say, with the tradition of interpreting oracles (scapulimancy, plastromancy etc.).

The art of predicting the future from graphs—mainly referred to as *chaizi* 拆字 (dissecting graphs), *cezi* 測字 (calculating graphs), *pozi* 破字 (breaking graphs), or *xiangzi* 相字 (practising physiognomy on graphs)—is used by common fortune-tellers and in prognosticatory texts or prophecies.[9] Specialists in the analysis of graphs may offer a prepared set of graphs or words on bamboo sticks or other material, or a prefabricated list for the customer to select from at random; in other cases the client is free to write down any graph or word of his / her own choice. The interpretation of a dissected graph can either refer to a specific situation or event, to the client's entire life, to the fate of a ruler or dynasty, or even to the political future of the empire.[10]

The practice of dissecting graphs as a literary or rhetorical device can be traced back to early sources such as the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 (Traditions of Zuo [Qiuming]).[11] Although this practice became very popular among poets, writers, scholars, and politicians of the Later Han period, bibliographic evidence for the first known manual on glyphomancy dates from a much later period.[12] The bibliographic chapter of the *Sui shu* 隋書 (Book of the Sui) lists the title *Pozi yaojue* 破字要訣 (Essentials of Breaking Graphs), a work in one scroll (*juan* 卷) which is not transmitted.[13] Given the intellectual trends during the Song period, it comes as no surprise that we know the names of glyphomancers such as Yang Shi 楊石 (twelfth century), a legendary graph analyst who was held in high esteem

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[9] For observations on fortune-tellers using glyphomantic techniques made by Westerners see Doolittle ([1865] 1966), vol. 2, pp. 335f, and de Groot (1890). For more recent observations see e.g. Bauer (1979), and for biographic notes on some anthologies of *yuyan* 預言 (prophecies) see Führer (1997), pp. 113-142 and passim.

[10] As for prophecies and (pseudo) prognosticatory texts, the *Tuibeitu* 推背圖 (*Back-pushing Illustrations*) attributed to Yuan Tiangang 袁天罡 (?-627) and the court astrologer and mathematician Li Chunfeng 李淳風 (602-670), and the *Shaobingge* 燒餅歌 (Shaobing Song) which is attributed to Liu Ji 劉基 (1311-1375) but was probably written up during the late Qing period, are the two most popular texts of this kind. An interesting translation of the *Tuibeitu* prepared by an anonymous person was published in Shanghai under the title *Push Him Out!, or: A Book of Chinese Prophecy*, later translations include Lee (1950) and Bauer (1973); see also the more recent suggestions on its authorship in Chin-Bing (1990). For material on the *Shaobingge* (including partial translations and explanations) see Führer (1997). For a sound case study on a prophecy on future rulership see e.g. Shen Dingping (1982).

[11] See *Zuo Zhuan*, p. 397 [23: 20a; Xuan 12] for the famous passage describing *wu* 武 (martial, war) as a compound of *zhi* 止 (stop) and *ge* 戈 (spear). For more textual evidence of early examples see the short excursion in *Zichu*, p. 55.

[12] See *Hou Han shu* 13: p. 534 and 26: p. 908 for examples.

[13] See *Sui shu*, 35: p. 1032.

by later generations of practitioners.[14] Furthermore, we find considerably detailed essays and monographs on this method of divination from the Song period up to the present.[15]

Important sources of the later imperial period include the *Zichu* 字觸 (Associations [Evoked] by Graphs) by Zhou Lianggong 周亮工 (1612-1672), as well as the *Chaizi shu* 拆字數 ([Calculating] Fate by Dissecting Graphs) and the *Xinding zhi mingxin fa* 新訂指明心法 (New Edition of Methods for Pointing to a Clear Heart) which are both transmitted in the [*Gujin*] *Tushu jicheng* [古今]圖書集成 (1725).[16] Much of the relevant material in this encyclopaedia is composed in the form of *ge* 歌 (songs) or *fu* 賦 (rhymed prose) and was presumably rhymed for mnemonic purposes, and there is also evidence of graphology playing a part in graph analysis. Further to these sources, the historian Zhao Yi 趙翼 (1727-1814) preserved some invaluable material on the history and the practice of 'calculating graphs.'[17]

Although celebrated by later generations as an accomplished writer, Zhou Lianggong became a victim of emperor Qianlong's 乾隆 (1736-1796) literary inquisition when in 1787, i.e. more than a century after his death, the editors of the *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 discovered a passage in one of his poems which they interpreted as a concealed offensive allusion to the Manchu conquest of China.[18] Nonetheless, Zhou Lianggong's *Zichu* was first printed in Nanjing in the year 1667; it is included in Wu Chongyue's 伍崇曜 (1810-1863) *Yueyatang congshu* 粵雅堂叢書, a collectanea "printed in 30 instalments over a period of some thirty years in the middle of the nineteenth century,"[19] and a punctuated

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[14] Yang Shi was a native of Chengdu who went to the capital during the Xuanhe 宣和 reign-period (1119-1125). *Zichu*, pp. 22f., lists a number of stories about him foretelling the future and names *Chaizi zhuan* 拆字傳 (Biographies of Graph Analysts) and *Shuohai* 說海 (Sea of Fiction) as its sources. On the practice of dissecting graphs prior to Yang Shi see the notes and references in *Gaiyu congkao*, *juan* 34, p. 733.

[15] For an outline on some of the relevant source material see Bauer (1979), pp. 73-80. Further manuals for practicioners include the *Chaizi yi* 拆字意 (Ideas on Dissecting Graphs) edited by a certain Mr. Liang 梁 and published in 1801; see Smith (1991), p. 204. For examples of more recent manuals and accounts on dissecting graphs see e.g. Kong Richang (1975) and Huyan Hong (1986).

[16] On Zhou Lianggong see Fang Chao-Ying (1943). For *Chaizi shu* and *Xinding zhi mingxin fa* see [*Gujin*] *Tushu jicheng*, vol. 59, *juan* 747-748, pp. 500-521.

[17] For Zhao Yi's article on glyphomancy see the short section 'Cezi' 測字 (Calculating Graphs) in his notebook-like *Gaiyu congkao*, *juan* 34, pp. 733f.

[18] For details on this case see Wang Zhongmin (1931) and the short summery in Hung (1939).

[19] Momose (1943), p. 868.

version is conveniently available in the *Congshu jicheng* 叢書集成 collection published between 1935 and 1937.[20]

In contrast to the *Tushu jicheng* material which deals exclusively with glyphomancy (including graphology), the *Zichu* goes far beyond the realm of predicting the future through graph analysis and includes a wealth of passages about 'dissecting graphs' as a literary device. Zhou Lianggong distinguishes six types or strategies of graphs analysis; his book is arranged in six scrolls (*juan*), each offering examples for one of these types.

In the title of his book Zhou Lianggong used the word *chu* 觸 ('to touch [upon]') and therewith implied that graph analysis involves a certain extent of guesswork, even haphazard guesses, and associations (*suiyi suo chu* 隨意所觸).[21] That is to say that the term *chu* indicates that the analyst is not bound by the rules of graph analysis as laid out by scholars such as Xu Shen and his successors. The *Zichu* is not concerned with technical aspects such as *jianbi* 減筆 or 'reducing stroke(s)': e.g. 勤 → 勒, *tianbi* 添筆, or 'adding stroke(s)': e.g. 一 → 正, or the adaptations of the 'six scripts' (*liu shu*) in glyphomantic art. In the context of historical, local and individual changes and adaptations, it is not surprising that a comparison of glyphomantic manuals reveals that the technical terminology is used with much flexibility.[22]

In the following, I shall not elaborate on these technical aspects but attempt to sketch an illustrated account of Zhou Lianggong's approaches towards the interpretation of graphs.

Sou 廋: Concealing

Under the first heading *sou* 廋 ('hidden,' 'mysterious') which is also referred to in other sources as *souci yinyu* 廋辭隱語 (concealed words and hidden expressions), we find a variety of riddles, enigmas, allegorical puns and satires in which several graphs refer to one expression or idea.[23] This expression or idea may correspond to one graph, to a sequence of graphs or words, or to names etc.

In order to decipher the riddle and discover the level B, i.e. the actual message or 'riddle base' (*midi* 謎底), a two step strategy is often required. The first step is usually by analogy (morphological, semantic or otherwise), and the sec-

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[20] See *Congshu jicheng* [*chubian*], vol. 722. If not indicated otherwise, reference is given to this edition of the *Zichu*.

[21] *Zichu*, p. 1 (*xu* 序).

[22] For systematised and illustrated explanations of technical aspects see Bauer (1979), pp. 81-90.

[23] For more details on riddles see Mark (1979).

ond step is often based on combining or dissecting components (including componential analogy) of graphs which evolved from the first level of analysis.

Political criticism was frequently expressed through concealed meanings, and allegorical techniques provided excellent tools for venting such criticism.[24] Puzzles and riddles challenge jest and wittiness; on the political stage, they were thus used to express intellectual superiority, and as a way for courtiers to gain the ruler's favour by winning such riddle-competitions.[25] Riddles also served as a convenient informal means to evaluate the capabilities of candidates for political or administrational functions.[26]

A story about Wang Anshi 王 安 石 (1021-1086) serves as an example for hidden political criticism. When Wang Anshi was at the height of his political power, an unknown person allegedly wrote the following text on the wall of the 'chancellor's temple' (*xiangguo si* 相 國 寺): *zhongsui huangwu hupu jiao pinnü daili luo zhetiao anong qu jia jingluo yao xinjing koudao lai gongpiao* 終 歲 荒 蕪 湖 浦 焦 貧 女 戴 笠 落 柘 條 阿 儂 去 家 京 洛 遙 心 驚 寇 盜 來 攻 剽.[27]

On the textual surface or 'riddle face' (*mimian* 謎 面), this short heptasyllabic poem reads something like:

> 終 歲 荒 蕪 湖 浦 焦
> Throughout the year, land is uncultivated, lakes and shores are burned,
> 貧 女 戴 笠 落 柘 條
> [A] poor woman wears [a] bamboo hat, branches of the *zhe* tree fall down.
> 阿 儂 去 家 京 洛 遙
> You leave your home, the capital Luoyang is afar,
> 心 驚 寇 盜 來 攻 剽
> The heart is frightened by robbers and thieves who may come, attack and plunder.

What seems like a simple text at first glance, actually works on a number of different levels and illustrates interpretive techniques for so-called *souci* (concealed words):

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[24] For an early example of hidden critique on useless officials see *Shijing*, p. 441 [31: 13b-14a].

[25] Cf. e.g. the anecdotes surrounding paragons such as Dongfang Shuo 東 方 朔 (154-93 BC), especially the aspect of competition as mentioned in *Han shu*, 65: 2863 and elsewhere.

[26] For a famous test put forward by Cao Cao 曹 操 (155-220) see Yang Yong (1988), pp. 441f. [11.3].

[27] *Zichu*, p. 4.

1) "Throughout the year" or "the whole year" (*zhong sui* 終 歲) is equivalent to twelve lunar months or *shier yue* 十 二 月: by combining the graphs *shi* 十, *er* 二 and *yue* 月, we get *qing* 青.
2) When 'land is uncultivated' (*huangwu* 荒 蕪), grass (*cao* 艸) grows on fields (*tian* 田): by putting 艸 ('grass') on a 田 ('field'), we get *miao* 苗.
3) When lakes and shores are burned (*jiao* 焦), the water (*shui* 水 / 氵) is gone (*qu* 去): by combining 水 / 氵 and 去, we get *fa* 法.
4) The passage about the women (*nü* 女) wearing a bamboo hat (*li* 笠) refers to the graph *an* 安 for the shape of a *li* 笠 resembles the graphic component '宀'.
5) The passage about the branches of the *zhe* 柘 tree (*cudrania triloba*; a kind of mulberry tree) shows a similar approach: The branches of this tree are very straight; the idea of straight timber or wood is depicted in the graph *mu* 木. The graph *zhe* 柘 with the component 木 'fallen off' (*luo* 落) becomes *shi* 石.
6) *Anong* 阿 濃 is an expression used in the speech (*yan* 言) of Wu 吳, parts of which are also associated with the name Pu 浦, a word used in the first line of the poem. By combining *yan* 言 and *wu* 吳, we get *wu* 誤.
7) In poetic language, giving up one's home and family (*qu jia* 去 家) and longing for Luoyang 洛 陽 tends to be associated with the glorious past (of one of the empire's most important former capitals). The passage "the capital Luoyang is afar" seems to refer primarily to a distance in time, to the good gone days. Although smaller than Kaifeng 開 封, Luoyang was hardly second to the capital as a cultural centre of the wealthy elite at the time. On the political scene, it was the centre of the opposition against Wang Anshi. In the writer's view, contemporary society deviated from the esteemed values of the past. With such deterioration, worries about the nation's present state had become topical. The passage thus alludes to the expression *you guo* 憂 國; and since capitals tend to represent countries (*guo* 國), only the second word of this expression becomes part of level B.
8) When the "heart is afraid of robbers and thieves," people are victims of robbers, and injustice is done to the populace. Such circumstances are signs of bad rulership, described in the *Mengzi* 孟 子 and elsewhere by the term *zei min* 賊 民 (to harm [one's] people).[28] The occurrence of the two synonyms *kou* 寇 (robbers) and *dao* 盜 (thieves) is an emphasis which indicates that we should not only take the final word *min* 民 (*people*) but the whole expression *zei min* 賊 民 on to level B.

Level B of the cryptogram thus reads: "[With] the green sprout law [Wang] Anshi misleads [his] country and steals from [his] people [or: harms [his] people]"

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[28] See e.g. *Mengzi* (4A.2), p. 125 [7A:6a]. It may be worth noting here that the book *Mengzi* played a central role in Wang Anshi's reforms.

(*qingmiao fa Anshi wu guo zei min* 青 苗 法 安 石 誤 國 賊 民). The 'graffiti' reveals the criticism on Wang Anshi

1) by taking the *qingmiao fa* (green sprout law), i.e. tax regulations concerning landownership and uncultivated land, as *pars pro toto* for his policies and reforms[29] (Note that the aspect of uncultivated land is mentioned outspokenly in the poem.);
2) by stating his name directly;
3) by concluding with the persuasive power of a set phrase.

In addition to riddles with a political agenda, Zhou Lianggong listed a number of so-called *lihe shi* 離 合 詩 ('diverging-converging poems') under the category *sou*. These poems convey hidden meanings or even the author's identity in a concealed form. Riddle-poems in which graphs are dissected (*li* 離) in order to be reconstructed ('putting together': *he* 合) by the reader, became very popular during the Southern Dynasties and remained a popular minor art form ever since.[30] Examples of such *lihe shi* are attributed to rulers and to some of the finest poets such as Xie Lingyun 謝 靈 運 (385-433), Xie Huilian 謝 惠 連 (397-433), Liu Jun 劉 駿 (430-464; Song Xiaowudi 宋 孝 武 帝), Xiao Yan 蕭 衍 (464-549; Liang Wudi 梁 武 帝) and others.[31]

The following example of paronomasia where graphs are dissected to indicate a covert meaning puzzled some of China's most outstanding bibliographers. When the compilers of the *Siku quanshu zongmu* 四 庫 全 書 總 目 (General Catalogue of Qianlong's Imperial Library) had to deal with the complex question of the authorship of the *Yue jue shu* 越 絕 書 (Book of Yue's Destruction [of Wu]), the bibliographers quoted from this history and topography of the states Wu 吳 and Yue 越.[32] Although the following passage is from an additional chapter which "appears to be misplaced,"[33] they conceived it as an example of the technique *sou*:

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[29] On this legislative measure and its implications and results see e.g. Qi Xia ([1959] 1979), pp. 127-133, Shuai Hongxun (1973), pp. 81-116, Deng Guangming (1975), pp. 96-105 etc.

[30] For the wider context see Marney (1993).

[31] For their *lihe shi* see *Zichu*, pp. 2f.

[32] See *Siku quanshu zongmu*, vol. 1, p. 583. On the *Yue jue shu* as a source for local topography see Needham (1959), p. 517; on the *Yue jue shu* see Schuessler and Loewe (1993); cf. also Schüssler (1966). For a summary of comments concerning authorship and veracity of this text see Deng Ruiquan and Wang Guanying (1998), pp. 308-310.

[33] Schuessler and Loewe (1993), p. 491.

> 以去為(生)[姓]，得衣乃成; 厥名有米，覆之以庚. 禹來東征，死葬其疆。…邦賢以口為姓，丞之以天。楚相屈原與之同名。[34]

The compilers of the *Siku quanshu zongmu* not only quoted this passage, but also added explanations which were initially suggested by Jiao Hong 焦竑 (1541-1620) who interpreted it as a cryptogram concealing the names of the alleged authors of the *Yue jue shu*:[35]

1) "Take *qu* 去 as surname (*xing* 姓); it [*qu* 去] gets (*de* 得) clothing (*yi* 衣) and it becomes complete," i.e. *qu* 去 and *yi* 衣 need to be combined into one graph. The combination of these two components resembles the graph *yuan* 袁 which functions as a surname.[36]
2) "His personal name (*jue ming* 厥名) has rice (*mi* 米);" and "*geng* 庚 (the seventh of the *tiangan* 天干) is used to cover (*fu* 覆) rice (*mi* 米)," i.e. by combining (putting one over the other) the graphs *mi* 米 and *geng* 庚, we get a graphic shape resembling *kang* 康 which functions as personal name (*ming* 名).[37]
3) According to legend, Yu 禹 was buried in Kuaiji 會稽.

All this is used to argue that Yuan Kang 袁康 (first century), a native of Kuaiji, was the author of the *Yue jue shu*. The text also informs us that Yuan Kang had an "able helper / assistant" (*bang xian* 邦 / 幫賢) or co-author. It is thus assumed that Wu Ping's 吳平 name is concealed in the second part of the riddle:

1) "Take the mouth (*kou* 口) as surname (*xing* 姓), and use the heaven (*tian* 天) to assist / support (*cheng* 丞) it" means that *tian* 天 and *kou* 口 need be combined with *tian* 天 supporting *kou* 口, i.e. its position must be under the *kou* 口. We thus get *wu* 吳 which functions as surname.[38]
2) The celebrated poet and minister of Chu 楚 is Qu Yuan 屈原 (c. 340-278 BC) whose personal name (*ming* 名) was Ping 平.

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[34] *Yue jue shu zhuzi suoyin*, p. 55. The quote of this passage in *Zichu*, p. 1, shows a slightly diverging orthography (承 for 丞); Zhou Lianggong refers to a certain Yang Yongxiu 楊用修 for the analysis of this passage.

[35] See *Jiao shi bicheng xuji*, 4: 11a-11b.

[36] Jiao Hong gave the following shortcut: *qu de yi nai yuan zi* 去得衣乃袁字.

[37] Jiao Hong suggested the following shortcut: *mi fu geng nai kang zi* 米覆庚乃康字.

[38] Jiao Hong suggested the following shortcut: *kou cheng tian wu zi* 口乘天吳字; but note that *Jiao shi bicheng xuji*, 4: 11b, has the same orthography as *Zichu*, i.e. 承 for 丞.

Whatever the relationship between this reading and the author's original intention, it is worth noting that concealing one's own name was clearly a very popular practice during the Later Han period. Kong Rong 孔融 (*zi*: Wenju 文舉; 153-208) for instance concealed his identity in a longish *lihe shi* 離合詩, the solution to which is 'Luguo Kong Wenju' 魯國孔文舉;[39] and Wei Boyang 魏伯陽 (fl. 145-167) has allegedly given hidden evidence of his place of origin and name in the 'Houxu' 後序 to the *Cantongqi* 參同契 (The Kinship of the Three).[40]

Other examples from this group involve oneiromancy; the following two accounts may suffice here. The sign of "an horizontal stick hitting the centre of the heaven" (*shu gan zhong tian* 豎竿中天) in a dream was interpreted as *wei* 未 (not yet) because an horizontal stick has the shape of a horizontal line: By putting *jue* 亅 (which resembles 丨) through the centre of the graph *tian* 天, we get *wei* 未.[41] And Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (1328-1398) once dreamt of "three persons (collectively) wearing one blood cap" (*san ren gong bian yi xue mao* 三人共弁一血冒). This sign was explained by Liu Ji 劉基 (1311-1375) as a reference to the word *zhong* 眾 (masses), i.e. the component 血 on top of a combination of three 人. The legendary advisor whose reputation as a specialist in occult arts is modelled after the legends about Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮 (181-234), thus interpreted it as an omen for Zhu Yuanzhang gaining the [support of the] masses (*de zhong* 得眾).[42]

In another example we see not only a multi-layered approach towards the anatomy of graphs but also a somewhat unusual context of graph analysis. Given the various accounts on glyphomancy, there are only few examples where the graph used for prognostication is not written down or selected by the customer but received by a seer or medium (*ji* 乩).

> 新安某君子病，召乩卜之，得三春二字。眾以爲可恃無虞。後九日竟卒。蓋三春者九日人也。[43]
>
> A certain noble in Xin'an fell ill and called for a spirit medium to make a prognostication. [The medium] received two words: 'three spring.' The crowd thought that they could presume upon [it] and nobody worried. After nine days, [the noble] died unexpectedly, for 'three spring' means 'nine-day-man.'

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[39] See *Zichu*, pp. 1f.

[40] See *Zichu*, p. 1; cf. also *Jiao shi bicheng xuji*, 4: 11b.

[41] See *Zichu*, p. 8.

[42] *Zichu*, p. 17.

[43] *Zichu*, p. 19.

Since the medium is believed to foretell the future in a manner which does not require further interpretative procedures, 'three spring' (*san chun* 三 春) is first taken at face value, i.e. in the sense of 'three years.' Since the first reading of the prediction proved wrong, the graph analyst needs to re-interpret the signs *post eventum*. The crux is not that he works with words supplied by a medium (*ji*), but that his analysis has for subject what was previously read as the message (level B). As for his graph analysis, the glyphomancer splits *chun* 春 into three components: *san* 三, *ren* 人, and *ri* 日. This seems particularly interesting because alternative readings of *chun* 春—such as dissecting it into the components *yi ri fu* 一 日 夫 ('one-day-man')[44]—are well documented and give ample evidence as to a relatively unconstrained attitude towards graphic components. The second interpretive step is to join the three words with the first word (*san* 三), a procedure which leads to the sentence *san san ren ri* 三 三 人 日 (three-three-man-day). Since reduplication of numbers can indicate multiplication, *san san* 三 三 is taken as 'nine'; the final step consists of re-arranging the order (人 日 → 日 人), and level B evolves as 'three-three [= nine] day-man,' i.e. 'a man of nine days.' Thus, the glyphomancer was able to show that although the prediction made by the medium was correct, it was simply misunderstood by the crowd: Common sense stands against the specialist's insights.

Wai 外: (Semantic) Extension

In the light of the examples given in the first two chapters, it appears difficult to clearly differentiate the characteristics of *sou* and *wai* 外 ('outside'). In almost all the examples listed in this section, we get one graph which undergoes various alterations according to the practices of *li* 離 (diverging) and *he* 合 (converging). We can thus identify the following basic rule: One word is explained in reference to two or more words which share components with the explained graph.

In the following prognostication, a given graph is split (*li*) into two graphs which share parts with the analysed graph. After referring to the graphic components, the analyst concludes with a set phrase which conveys the message unambiguously.

> 有 以 唐 字 問 母 病 者。 曰： 上 康 字 頭， 下 居 字 腳。 主 康 居 無 恙。[45]

[44] For the alternative reading of *chun* 春 see *Peixi ji*, p. 378 [1: 3a].

[45] *Zichu*, p. 29.

> Someone took the graph *tang* 唐 to ask about [his] mother's illness. [The glyphomancer] said: "The upper [part of *tang*] is the top [part] of *kang* 康 (healthy / peaceful), [its] lower [part] is the bottom [part] of *ju* 居 (dwelling). Your mother shall live in peace with no illness."

The technique of *he* (converging) reveals level B by combining graphs, components, or words. The following two stories serve as examples in which words or graphs are put together:

> 有以尼字問母病。龍曰：在加一夕成屍；明日必死。[46]
> Someone took the graph *ni* 尼 (nun) to ask about [his/her] mother's illness. [The glyphomancer] Long said: "Add one more evening [and she] becomes a corpse. She definitely dies tomorrow."

The graph *shi* 屍 (corpse) is construed as a combination of *ni* 尼 (nun), *yi* 一 (one) and *xi* 夕 (evening), while the final clause concludes the message in a most straightforward manner. Whereas the customer only supplied the graph *ni* 尼, the glyphomancer adds the words 'one evening' (*yi xi* 一 夕), the three words become components of the graph *shi* 屍. The analyst's statement works on both, the semantic and the graphic level.

Although the structure of the glyphomancer's verdict is slightly different, a similar approach is found in the next example. Note however that in his prognostication, the glyphomancer only uses graphic elements provided by the client:

> 以瓜子問父病。曰：死期近矣，合瓜子為孤字，固知必不生矣。[47]
> Someone took [the two graphs] *guazi* 瓜子 (melon seed(s) / melon) to ask about [his/her] father's illness. [The glyphomancer] said: "The time of death is already near. Combining melon (*gua* 瓜) and seeds (*zi* 子) means lonely (*gu* 孤), therefore I known that he definitely is not going to live."

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[46] *Zichu*, p. 28. As this story refers to the glyphomancer only by the surname Long, it may be noteworthy that a number of stories is reported about a celebrated glyphomancer named Long Youtu 龍有徒 who was a native of Henan; cf. *Zichu*, p. 31 and *passim*.

[47] *Zichu*, p. 29. Note that the version in *Congshu jicheng* indicates that this story is about the graph *gua* 瓜 whereas the version in *Yueyatang congshu* (2: 12a) gives the title as *guazi* 瓜子 which could either refer to 'melon seeds' or to 'melon.' Judging from the formulaic structure of such accounts, the text does not seem to refer to someone bringing a melon or melon seeds but writing down the two graphs *gua* 瓜 and *zi* 子.

Xi 晰: Dissecting and Analysing

Whereas in the *sou* section numerous graphs indicate one word, the examples under the heading *xi* 晰 ('enquire,' 'discriminate') are characterised by the dissection of one graph into components. These simpler graphs are then read as words which form the textual sequence that conveys the message (level B). As in the examples in other sections of the *Zichu*, glyphomancers frequently add a contextualised conclusion.

A story about Gao Yang 高 洋 (529-559) who established the Northern Qi dynasty and proclaimed the reign-period Tianbao 天 保 (Celestial Protection) in the year 550, is transmitted in *Bei shi* 北 史 (History of the Northern Dynasties), and serves as a good example here:

> 齊 文 宣 帝 改 年 為 天 保。 士 有 深 識 者 曰： 天 保 之 字 為 一 大 人 只 十。 帝 其 不 過 十 乎。[48]
> Emperor Wenxuan of [Northern] Qi proclaimed the reign-title Celestial Protection (Tianbao). A scholar of deep insights said: "The graphs 'heaven' (*tian* 天) [and] 'protecting' (*bao* 保) are 'one great man only ten.' The emperor will only have ten [years]!"[49]

A similar account is known about Zhao Kuangyi 趙 匡 義 (939-997) and the change of reign-period in the year 976:

> 宋 太 宗 改 元 太 平。 相 者 曰： 太 平 二 字 為 一 人 六 十； 壽 止 此 矣。 太 宗 享 年 果 應 其 言。[50]
> Emperor Taizong of Song changed the reign-title to Ultimate Peace (Taiping). A reader of shapes and forms said: "The two graphs 'ultimate' (*tai* 太) [and] 'peace' (*ping* 平) are 'one man six ten [= sixty]'. His life will come to an end at this [point]." And really, the number of years Taizong lived complies with what he said.[51]

Irrespective of when the prognostication was made, we identify the final statement—which was obviously added after the fulfilment—as a rhetorical device which underlines the power and authority of foreseers and prophets. As he moves the dot at the bottom of *tai* 太 to the top of *liu* 六, the analyst seems to enjoy

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48 See *Bei shi*, 7: 262, and *Zichu*, p. 47.

49 The emperor died during the tenth year of the Tianbao reign-period.

50 *Zichu*, p. 48.

51 Born on 20 November 939, he died on 8 April 997 at the age of 60 *sui* 歲; see the short article by Sung Ch'ang-lien (1976).

some freedom in handling graphic components. However, once we bear in mind that the text was initially written horizontally, this practice and the creation of the line *yi ren liu shi* 一 人 六 十 (one man six ten) appear much more natural.

In another account, the end of the Northern Song dynasty and the transmission of power to the Jurchen (Jin 金) only one year after Zhao Huan 趙 桓 (1100-1161; Song Qinzong 宋 欽 宗) proclaimed the reign-period Jingkang 靖 康 (Tranquil Peace) was reportedly foreseen from the shape of the graph *jing* 靖: "The graph *jing* 靖 stands for a reign of twelve months" (*jing zi dang li shier ge yue* 靖 字 當 立 十 二 箇 月).[52]

As the written word was "believed to be imbued with magical powers,"[53] posthumous names (*shi* 諡) were also subjected to graph analysis. The *shi* of Zhao Yun 趙 昀 (r. 1125-1164; [Southern] Song Lizong 宋 理 宗) for instance was changed a few times. At the end of the debate it was decided that his posthumous name should become Li 理 as a reference to the emperor's devotion to the so-called *lixue* 理 學 movement. The graph *li* 理 however was dissected into the components *si* 四, *shi* 十, and *yi* 一 and thus interpreted as a sign indicating that the emperor would reign for a total of forty one years (*sishiyi nian wangzhe zhi xiang* 四 十 一 年 王 者 之 象).[54]

Although my selection here features stories involving names of rulers and reign titles, other examples listed by Zhou Lianggong touch upon a variety of contexts, including prognostications about illness. In one such case, the graph *hao* 好 (good) was recorded in order to be analysed. The glyphomancer dissected the graph into its two main components *nü* 女 (woman / daughter) and *zi* 子 (son), and commented: "Only son(s) and daughter(s) remain. Nothing can be done, he will die [and] there is no help" (*yu zi nü yi, naihe, zu bu jiu* 餘 子 女 矣, 奈 何, 卒 不 救).[55]

Ji 幾: Providence or Incipience

Whereas the techniques described as *sou*, *wai*, and *xi* are based on the differentiation of graphic forms, the technique *ji* 幾 uses a fundamentally different approach. Its name derives from the passage "understanding incipience, this is divine indeed" (*zhi ji qi shen hu* 知 幾 其 神 乎) in the *Xici* 繫 辭 (Appended Phrases) commentary to the *Zhouyi* 周 易 (Changes of Zhou).[56] The underlying

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[52] *Zichu*, p. 49.
[53] Mark (1979), p. 63.
[54] *Zichu*, p. 49.
[55] *Zichu*, p. 53.
[56] See *Zhouyi*, p. 171 [8:13a].

perception is that if the 'springs' or 'seeds' (*ji* 幾) of things or events are known, 'the Way is understood' (*tong qi dao zhe* 同其道者).[57] This means in practical terms that not the graph functions as analytic paradigm but a concrete event, a situation or a concrete thing. This approach is established in reference to the legendary Cang Jie 蒼頡 who had reportedly 'observed images' (*guan xiang* 觀象) in order to 'understand script' (*zhi wen* 知文).[58] In his prognostication, the glyphomancer thus 'translates' signs, situations, things etc. into graphs which are then subject to graph analysis. The majority of cases listed under this heading is related to the analysis of signs and omina seen in dreams. The outspoken aim of this method is to foretell good fortune and evil, life and death, health and illness, success and failure.

The following story is about a sign perceived by the then humble Liu Bang 劉邦 (256-195). The *Zichu* gives no indication as to the source of this legend; the *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the Court Scribes) and other accounts however offer ample reference to similar omina:

> 漢高祖始為亭長，夢逐一羊拔角尾皆落。占曰：羊無角尾，王字也。果為漢王而王天下。[59]
>
> Initially, the First Emperor of the Han was a district leader; he dreamt of chasing a sheep and plucking its horns and tail [until] they all came off. The oneiromancer said: "A sheep with no horns and no tail, [that] stands for king / to rule (*wang* 王)." And indeed, he became King of Han and ruled the whole empire.

Compared to other legends about Liu Bang and the omina concerning his future as founding emperor of the Han dynasty, this story is comparatively plain. In the given context, it can however serve as an example for the analyst 'translating' a dream into graphs and 'replaying the story' on the graphic level. From the point of view of graph analysis, a slightly more complex approach is found in the following story about Sun Quan 孫權 (182-252):

> 吳王孫權嘗夢北面頓首于天帝，忽見一人以筆點其額。舉以問徵士熊循。循曰：吉祥矣。大王必爲主。王者人之主，額者王之上。王上加點，主之象也。[60]

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[57] See *Zichu* (*Fanli* 凡例 section) p. 2.

[58] See *Zichu* (*Fanli* 凡例 section), p. 2.

[59] *Zichu*, p. 57.

[60] *Zichu*, p. 58.

> Sun Quan, King of Wu, once dreamt that when facing north and kowtowing before the Celestial Emperor, he suddenly saw someone making a dot on his forehead with a brush. He got up and asked Xiong Xun, a specialist on reading signs. Xun said: "This is auspicious indeed. It is certain that Your Excellency will become the master / ruler. The king is the head of people, and the forehead is the top of the king. To add a dot on the king (*wang* 王), that is an image of [the graph] *zhu* 主 (master / ruler)."[61]

Xie 諧: Punning and Puzzling

In the cases listed under the heading *xie* 諧 ('harmonise'), dissecting graphs is used as a literary device. The riddles, puns, and puzzles are based on a variety of techniques, including phonetic similarities. One of the perhaps best known stories listed by Zhou Lianggong is a legend about the quick-witted courtier Dongfang Shuo 東 方 朔 (154-93 BC) who reportedly deciphered a conundrum which worked on the phonetic and on the graphic level.[62]

In some of the word-riddles listed under this heading, the solution is actually indicated more than once; they tend to conclude on an allegorical level which offers complementary reference to the graphic design. Apart from graphic approximations, functional ambiguities (word or meaning vs. graph or shape) as well as semantic ambiguities play an important role in these riddles.

> 四 山 相 對 頂 相 連。
> Four mountains face each other, [their] tops are connected to each other.
> 橫 也 川， 豎 也 川。
> Horizontally it is a river; vertically it is a river too.
> 團 團 一 家 共 十 口。
> A family getting together, in total ten persons.
> 只 有 四 口 不 周 全。[63]
> Only four persons are not complete / perfect.

The solution to this riddle is *tian* 田 (field); each line offers a different approach:

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[61] Sun Quan proclaimed himself emperor in the year 229.

[62] See *Zichu*, p. 71, and *Taiping yulan*, vol. 5, p. 4413 [965: 3b-4a]. *Han shu*, 65: 2841-2876, does not include this story.

[63] *Zichu*, p. 87.

1) The four *shan* 山 (mountains) need to be arranged in a way so that they face each other: 品. The middle strokes which need to 'be connected' indicate the top of the mountain as perceived in the pictographic  .
2) In order to facilitate the finding of the solution, the riddle is repeated, the same graph is just described in a different way: 川 + 三 = 田.
3) On the allegorical level, *kou* 口 (mouth) functions as a measure word. On the graphic level, we need to combine the graphs *shi* 十 (ten) and *kou* 口, the latter being taken for *wei* 囗 which is far less common and nearly exclusively reduced to its function as a semantic denominator.
4) Whereas the numeral 'ten' (*shi* 十) functions as a graphic component in line three, 'four' (*si* 四) needs to be taken in its literal sense here. Like in the previous line, *kou* 口 functions as a graphic element, but here it stands for *kou* 口 and not for *wei* 囗. The final phrase *bu zhouquan* 不 周 全 ('incomplete [in what is desired]') seems to indicate an evaluation of these different ways of telling the same riddle: The presentation given in the last line is deemed less desirable, it is considered a less clever way of presenting the puzzle.

Shuo 說: Explanations

Under the last heading, Zhou Lianggong offers an inspiring list of interpretations of graphs. Although a number of these explanations is presented in a glyphomantic context, the majority of examples consists of unorthodox and, in some cases, even obscure material on various epigraphical issues. Some cases represent rationalised versions of epigraphic developments, others establish more inspired relationships between graphic and semantic aspects. Although most of these explanations do—in one way or another—relate to written source material, the anecdotes largely aim at complementing these records and thus form an eminent part of the legends associated with some of the biggest names in Chinese history.

> 對，古從口。漢文以言多非誠，乃去口從士。[64]
>
> In antiquity, *dui* 對 (answering) is derived from 'mouth' (*kou* 口). [Emperor] Wen [r. 180-157 BC] of Han held that 'being rich in words means being not sincere,' the mouth (*kou* 口) was thus deleted and [*dui* is since] derived from 'scholar' (*shi* 士).

Although the perceived antagonism between verbosity and sincerity has a long tradition, the history of the graph *dui* is fairly well documented. The anecdotal explanation given here however needs to be put into context. The *Shuowen jiezi*

64 *Zichu*, p. 90.

offers a slightly more elaborate version of this account;[65] Xu Shen states that 對 derived from *kou* 口 (mouth) and refers to 對 as a graphic variant. But since 對 is attested in a number of Zhou sources, Duan Yucai 段 玉 裁 (1735-1815) and others have pointed out that the orthographic change was not made at random and that the variant 對 is certainly not an invention of Liu Heng 劉 恆 (202-157; Han Wendi).[66] Nevertheless, it is likely that during the reign of Han Wendi, preference was given to the variant 對 which subsequently became the standardised orthography.

Whatever the insights of linguists, etymologists and palaeographers, they are of rather limited relevance to the inspired graph analyst or poet who works in the wider intuitional framework of associations evoked by graphs, a practice which remains an eminent part not only of the tradition but still plays an important role in contemporary Chinese societies.

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[65] See *Shuowen jiezu zhu*, p. 103 [3A: 34b-35a], and Guo Zhongshu's 郭 忠 恕 (?-977) *Peixi ji*, p. 379 [1: 1b], for a later version of this story.

[66] See *Shuowen jiezu zhu*, p. 103 [3A: 35a].

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